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ABSTRACT

Community colleges are recognized today as critical links between high schools and four-year colleges. This paper presents a research model for understanding the transfer function and transfer performance at the level of the college. The model discusses the community college in terms of its capacity for institutionalizing functions and its overall functional effectiveness in adapting to environmental conditions. The model posits that effective levels of transfer function institutionalization and institutional adaptability relate to high transfer performance. Sixty community colleges will be assessed for the extent to which certain environmental elements influence their transfer performance. The assessment will evaluate such external environmental elements as proximity of senior institutions and local economic conditions, and such institutional elements as percentage of full-time students and tuition and fees. Second, 6 of the 60 colleges with high and low transfer rates will be compared by the way they have institutionalized the transfer functions through their organizational climates and adaptive capacities. By using an organized approach in intitutional transfer research, investigators will be able to identify critical variables affecting transfer effectiveness and can monitor changes in these variables over time. (38 references) (JDD)

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Why the Concern about Community College Transfer Performance and How Should it be Assessed?

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Red Lion-Jantzen Beach in Portland, Oregon, November 1-4, 1990. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Abstract

Recent calls to revitalize the community college transfer function stem from national concern for educational reform, shared responsibilities between community college and senior institutions, and the changing population demographics. These imperatives and changes not only establish the community colleges as critical links between high schools and four-year colleges but also make the effectiveness of the college's transfer function a major agenda item in higher education for the 1990s.

Research pertaining to the transfer functions and its outcome, transfer performance, suggests that variations in institutional transfer practices and transfer rates exist among community colleges nationwide. Attempts to explain these phenomena have been unorganized and questionable due to the lack of institutional models and correlation between institutional transfer operations and transfer performance.

The research model presented in this paper is an attempt to organize efforts in understanding the transfer function and transfer performance at the level of the college. Conceptually, the institutional analysis framework addresses the transfer components of institutionalization [of the transfer function] ; organizational climate; organizational adaptation; and institutional performance.

Analysis of the transfer model will be assessed by quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The quantitative approach uses multiple regression analyses to determine the effects of environmental conditions (external and institutional) on transfer performance. The qualitative approach employs a case study analysis of colleges with high and low transfer rates. Qualitative assessments focus on the colleges' abilities to institutionalize the transfer function; to adapt to their environments; and to promote the transfer function.

It is anticipated that the analysis model of transfer will provide researchers with a more organized method to evaluate institutional transfer effectiveness.

Why the Concern about Community College Transfer Performance and How Should It be Assessed?

Recent calls to revitalize the community college transfer function stem from national concern for educational reform, shared responsibilities with senior institutions, and the changing population demographics (Bender, 1990; Knoell, 1990). At the end of the 1970s many states reacting to educational reform calls mandated strengthening academic programs at postsecondary levels (Bender, 1990). As senior institutions increased admissions requirements and re-evaluated their general education courses, community colleges were forced to implement stronger standards in their academic programs and to reassess their own liberal arts course offerings. Additionally, new master plans for higher education in many states have emphasized that community colleges share responsibility with senior institutions in educating students in lower-division courses (Knoell, 1990). These plans require the community colleges to re-examine their missions and functions as they relate to other types of postsecondary institutions. Further, because community colleges enroll more than 50 percent of all underrepresented minority undergraduates, the colleges are being viewed as important vehicles for moving these students into baccalaureate programs (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). Sociopolitical pressures from minority groups and legislators aimed at increasing the numbers of underrepresented minority students in upper-division postsecondary programs have caused the community colleges to become more attentive to not only their transfer numbers but also to whom they are transferring to senior institutions.

These imperatives establish community colleges as critical links between high schools and four-year colleges. More so, the imperatives make the effectiveness of the college's transfer function a major agenda item in higher education for the 1990s. In the coming years, the community college transfer function will undergo heavy

scrutiny by state legislators, educational critics and leaders, and the larger public. Their concerns will focus on how well the community colleges perform in moving students into baccalaureate programs.

Defining Terms and Concepts

The terms and concepts associated with transfer used in this paper are as follows. Transfer refers to the movement of students from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities (Cohen, 1979). The transfer function is a process which supports this movement of students (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). And, it comprises the activities of the institution dedicated to transferring students. More concrete examples of what make-up the function are the liberal arts curriculum, articulation of courses with senior institutions, academic counseling services, etc. Transfer performance, the outcomes of the function, relates to the institution's ability to move students toward transfer through academic credit completion and to subsequently place students in senior institutions (Cohen, 1990). Transfer rate is the share of students moving on to four-year colleges and universities. Transfer rates can be calculated by a cross-sectional measure of the number of transfers over a given cohort (e.g. first-time entrants, full-time students, etc.) or by longitudinal analysis involving a given cohort's progress in transferring over a period of time (Banks, 1990; Cohen, 1990). As discussed in an earlier paper (Banks, 1990), much controversy is associated with accurate measures of transfer; however, longitudinal cohort analysis over an extended period of time (four or more years) appears to provide a fairly accurate estimate of an institution's transfer performance (Cohen, 1990; Schmitz & delMas, 1989).

Transfer Rate Performance

How effective are the community colleges at transferring students? Among national transfer studies, four reports have revealed the following evidence on transfer rates. Using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Longitudinal Study, Holmstrom and Bisconti (1974) found for the first-time, full-time

entering community college in 1968 more than half (51%) had transferred to senior institutions by 1972. An analysis of the High School Graduating Class of 1972 (National Longitudinal Study (NLS)) conducted by Adelman (1988) established two-year college students were transferring at a 20 percent rate within 14 years. Grubb (1990) cited the transfer rate of the 1980 high school graduates (High School and Beyond Study) attending community colleges was 20 percent within a four year period. And, reporting on the 1984 first-time entering cohort of 48 institutions (77,000 students), the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (1990) claimed the transfer rate of students obtaining 12 or more credits to be 24 percent after four years. The differences in the above measured rates can be explained by sample cohort (i.e. full-time v. high school graduates v. first-time college entrants) and by the time which transfer activity was measured (i.e. four years v. fourteen years).

At system and state levels several major studies have tracked two-year college entering cohorts. Alba and Lavin (1981), measuring transfer rates of the 1970 entering cohort who aspired to a baccalaureate degree in the CUNY system, claimed 25 percent of the students transferred to senior institutions by the end of their fifth year. Using a similar restriction in his sample, Sheldon (1981) estimated only a 19 percent transfer rate after three years for the 1978 entering cohort of 15 California Community Colleges. And, the Maryland State Board for Community Colleges (1989) found 24 percent of the first-time, full-time 1984 freshmen in their community colleges had transferred by Fall 1988. The differences in these rates can be partially explained by sampling methods, state definition of transfer students, and the length of time used to measure rates.

Interinstitutional transfer rates differ widely between colleges in the same states. For the 1984 first-time entering cohort obtaining 12 or more credits in eight California community colleges, the range of transfer rates by institution was 3 to 30 percent, while eight Texas colleges ranged from 11 to 34 percent (Center for the Study

of Community Colleges, 1990). Additionally, estimates of institutional transfer rates based on 1984 first and full-time students for 17 Maryland community colleges varied from 10 to 36 percent (Maryland State Board for Community Colleges, 1989). Although these two studies tracked different cohorts over a four year period, students obtaining 12 or more credits versus full-time students, it is evident that the transfer rates differ between institutions in the same states. But why does transfer performance vary from institution to institution?

Factors Affecting Transfer Performance

The body of literature on the community college transfer function suggests there are three broad categories of factors affecting transfer: (1) student characteristics; (2) institutional influences; and (3) external influences such as state policies on articulation and transfer, unemployment, etc.

Student Characteristics

Of the three categories the most widely measured effects on transfer have been with student variables. Transfer students emerge from a diverse group of students attending community colleges. Overall, students aspiring to attain a baccalaureate degree represent about a third of all enrollees (Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Sheldon, 1981). A comparison of the transfer aspirants to the total student body reveals the following demographic profiles (Alba & Lavin, 1981; Cohen & Brawer, 1987, 1989; Sheldon, 1981). Aspirants are usually younger (15 to 24 years old) than the mean age student of 29 years; they are full-time students (64%) as compared to the majority of enrollees being part-time (67%); they have taken college preparatory courses in high school (81%); and they are from middle to high socioeconomic quartiles whereas 47 percent of all students constitute the lowest socioeconomic quartile. Findings from studies by Holmstrom and Bisconti (1974), Peng (1977), and Velez (1985) suggest moderate to strong predictors of whether or not a student will transfer are: high family

socioeconomic status, academic programs taken in high school, good high school GPAs, and good academic performance in the community college.

Although a combination of factors relating to financial resources, academic high school preparation, and the desire to transfer provide a favorable foundation for a student to continue through the educational pipeline, only about half of the transfer aspirants actually make it to a senior institution. This suggests the student is not the sole determining agent in his or her progress toward baccalaureate degree attainment. After matriculation in a community college, the student is influenced by environmental press, institutional organization and climate (Clark, 1960; Gates & Creamer, 1984). The extent to which these influences impact a student's decision to transfer is mediated by the degree of value that an institution places on transfer and its resulting practices.

Institutional Influences

Community colleges are diverse in structure, function, and practice. Bender (1990) describes community colleges by state system can be vocational/technical institutions, a combination of vocational/technical and comprehensive institutions, components of universities, or single comprehensive colleges. Considering the functions of community colleges, some will have a stronger vocational orientation than a transfer one. Institutional practices specific to enhancing the transfer function are assessment and placement of students, special curricular articulation with senior institutions, student service initiatives (e.g. transfer centers, orientations, etc.), and faculty advising (Cohen, et. al., 1985; Rendon, et al., 1988; Richardson & Bender, 1986).

Regression studies measuring the transfer rates affected by institutional structure, function, and practices reveal the following results. Holmstrom and Bisconti (1974) using CIRP data found private colleges were a moderate predictor of transfer. Researchers manipulating the longitudinal study of the 1972 high school cohort (NLS) data base established that living quarters, high contact with faculty, academic program

offerings, and low college enrollment all had significant and positive influences on transfer rates (Anderson, 1984 a&b; Velez & Javalgi, 1987). Additionally, McIntyre's (1984) study of 103 California community colleges showed that full-time student enrollment, percent of student contact hours taught in BA eligible courses, and special efforts to improve the transfer function were positively correlated to transfer rates.

Case studies of nationwide community colleges by Cohen, et al. (1985); Rendon et al. (1988); and Turner (1987) suggest there is a strong interplay of institutional forces that facilitate the movement of students towards a baccalaureate degree. In particular, Cohen et al. (1985) cites special intervention activities (e.g. student orientations and counseling); coordinated financial aid packages; consistent scheduling of transfer courses; and regular meetings with faculty and staff assist in improving the student's social and academic integration into the college. Rendon and others (1988) assert that faculty attitudes about the transfer function and the college collecting data on student retention and transfer for feedback to staff are important components in enhancing the transfer function. And, Turner (1987) claims target curriculum, especially English courses designed for bilingual students like Hispanics, can improve student persistence in the community college.

Additionally, more recent investigations by Berman and Weiler (1989, 1990) and Minicucci, Berman, and Weiler (1989) suggest that institutional transfer performance is affected by not only institutional practices (e.g. coordination, planning, etc.) but also by how the practices are administered and by the leadership guiding the practices.

External Influences

The public community college is subject to regulations and influences imposed by its external environment. Bender (1990) explains that if community colleges could be positioned by state systems along a continuum, at one end of this dimension there would be colleges controlled by consolidated governing boards executing policies that

apply to all levels of institutions and at the other end, colleges would be subjected to local rules. Besides formal policies set by state and local boards, the colleges are also influenced by admission and acceptance standards of senior institutions, state funding student financial aid distributions, and general environmental press issues such as proximity of senior public institutions, area unemployment, etc. (Alkin & Hendrix, 1967; Knoell, et al., 1990; McIntyre, 1984, 1987; Rendon, et al., 1988).

An early study of environmental influences on the transfer rate of 15 California community colleges by Alkin and Hendrix (1967) revealed 85 percent of the variance in students transferring could be explained by community family income employment levels (e.g. blue versus white collar workers), educational attainment levels, and population of the college's district. Later McIntyre (1984,1987), using a series of regression analyses, demonstrated that higher senior institution admission requirements, active military draft and greater unemployment periods, as well as increased distance of senior institutions all had negative effects on the transfer rates at California community colleges.

Qualitative studies by Cohen, et al. (1985); Bender (1990); Knoell, et al. (1990); Rendon, et al. (1988); Richardson and Bender (1986) and Turner (1987, 1988) concur that formal course articulation agreements between community colleges and their receiving senior institutions and student tracking systems reporting on student progress and performance are critical ingredients for improving the transfer function. Less clear, are the effects of transfer initiatives. The Minicucci, Berman, and Weiler (1989) evaluation of the state funded transfer centers in California suggests that the community colleges having these centers [as compared to California colleges without state funded centers] improved their overall transfer rates, especially for Asian and Hispanic students. On another note, Rendon, et al. (1988) argues that transfer initiatives [like transfer centers] have had little impact on transfer rates

She cites although Texas has offered several major initiatives, the transfer rates of Hispanic students decreased.

The Need for a Transfer Performance Assessment Model

As the findings from previous studies suggest, environmental conditions (e.g. unemployment, proximity of senior institutions, institutional demographics, etc.) and institutional activities and practices do influence college transfer performance. Yet, a comprehensive picture explaining how and why these influences would affect performance is lacking. The inability to assess performance within the context of the college is due to the dearth of institutional analysis frameworks explaining the transfer function as it relates to performance.

Currently, Berman and Weiler (1989,1990) are developing a model that examines transfer performance at the institution's level. They emphasize that transfer rate is largely affected by factors (e.g. state policies, unemployment, institutional demographics, etc.) beyond the control of the college and that performance is dependent on the college's organizational environment and the ability of the college to implement specific transfer-related activities. Their model centers on predicting expected transfer rates based upon certain environmental conditions of the institution. Although their model does provide a framework for analysis, it does not consider the college's capacity to institutionalize and promote its transfer function.

A Conceptual Model for Understanding Transfer Performance

The model presented here discusses the community college in terms of: its capacity for institutionalizing functions and its overall functional effectiveness to adapt to environmental conditions. It is designed to explain the variations in transfer performance between colleges. Much of the theoretical basis for the model has been drawn from Zucker's (1983; 1988) works on organizational analysis and from effectiveness models developed by Cameron (1986, 1985) and Faerman and Quinn (1985).

Early organizational theorists asserted that the external environment of institutions differentially selected organizations for survival based on a fit between institutional structure and environmental characteristics (Aldrich, 1979; Hannan & Freeman, 1977; McKelvey, 1982). Opposing theories suggest that institutions are not passive structures but are actors with a capacity to define their own position within their social and organizational environments (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Zucker, 1983) This capacity can be characterized by collective actions of the institution such as the formal coordination, assessment, and planning of activities and by the leadership who fosters a cooperative working environment among employees (Cameron, 1986; Krakower, 1985; Zucker, 1983).

Formal collective actions and management style tend to promote institutionalization through: (1) rules and structure; (2) legitimacy and networks; and (3) organizational climate.

Rules and structure of an organization generated by formal actions minimize individual self-interest conflicts (Zucker, 1988). In this sense, institutional operations are placed within a context of a rational coordinated system. Rules define the roles of institutional actors and regulate institutional operations. Structured activities (e.g. organizing, assessing or evaluating, planning, and allocating) when systematically applied maximize orderliness in the system by providing a focus and context for institutional actors.

Legitimation is central to the concept of institutionalization. Legitimation not only involves the adoption of recognized principles or standards but also links to how well an organization performs its functions. The legitimization of elements, actions, or roles is important for the diffusion of ideas. Legitimation incurs a degree of support from institutional actors. "Once one element, role, or action is legitimated in a formally organized system, it can pass on its affirmed status to others" (Zucker, 1988). And, the rate that legitimacy spreads is dependent upon the types and numbers of networks

formed in the system (Zucker, 1983; 1988). If network ties are positive and richly connected, legitimacy spreads easily but the absence of ties or negative ties can prevent legitimacy from becoming infectious. "Formally organized collectivities causally produce an increase in the number and types of networks ties among elements, positions, and actors when actors are granted rights to act" (Zucker, 1988). Institutional actors given the responsibilities of decision-making in structured activities and of coordinating activities within the institution will increase networks by "adding to the number of entities who interact and creating new kinds of relations that can act as ties" (Zucker, 1988).

Organizational climate (i.e. "the internal processes that define personal relationships among the organizational members" (Ewell & Lisensky, 1988)), if positive, can promote legitimacy of new elements and establish substantial networks. A positive organizational climate allows for trust and support to build among institutional employees. In return cooperative working relationships are established and internal conflict and competing self-interest groups are minimized. These working relationships lay a foundation for which new concepts and ideas can diffuse. Research on organizational climate suggests positive climates are correlated with institutional productivity and achievement (Litwin and Stringer, 1968; Moss-Kanter, 1983). Climate factors such as communication, decision-making processes, and motivation are shaped by the management style of the institution's leader (Ewell & Lisensky, 1988; Franklin, 1975; Gellerman, 1959; Roueche & Baker, 1987). Moreover, the institutional leadership can provide the organization with coherency and stability (Cameron, 1986; Ewell & Lisenky, 1988).

As coherency and stability bring about the institutionalization of functions, in turn the embedded practices and activities increase coherency and stability of the organization (Zucker, 1988). This phenomenon of increased institutional coherency

and stability is transacted through the number and kinds of networks formed in the system (e g. articulation practices with senior institutions, etc.).

Institutional stability and coherency also increase the adaptability of an organization to its environment. Conditions existing in the environment (i.e. external and institutional) have the potential to negatively influence the college's outcomes (e g. the effect of low full-time student enrollment on transfer performance, etc.) Colleges that have built their capacity of coping through coherency and stability mediate negative influences by their established networks in the system. Nevertheless, coherency and stability can lead to institutional rigidity if the college solely focuses on protocol to organize and manage itself (Quinn, 1988). Effective criteria for institutional adaptability additionally encompasses the concepts of flexibility of operations and management (e.g. decentralization of functions), external focus of institution (e g. competitive position of the institution in its overall system), and planning and goal setting (Faerman & Quinn, 1985). To this end, the effectiveness of institutional adaptability can be measured along these dimensions

The conceptual model posed here suggests that the institutionalization of elements, actions, etc. are enhanced by the coherency and stability of an institution's system created by its formal structure, networks, and climate. Likewise, as a college establishes and develops its transfer function, the institution increases its capacity of effectiveness in dealing with environmental factors that influence transfer performance. Measures of effective adaptedness are promoted by coherency and stability and address institutional flexibility, focus, and planning. Overall, this model posits that effective levels of transfer function institutionalization and institutional adaptability relate to high transfer performance.

Analytical Framework

The conceptual model presented above will be applied to my current research. Analysis of the model is to be conducted in two ways. First, 60 public community

colleges, drawn from a nationwide sample of community colleges participating in the Transfer Assembly Project (the Center for the Study of Community Colleges), will be assessed for the extent to which certain environmental elements influence their transfer performance. Second, of the 60 colleges, six colleges with high and low transfer rates will be compared by their institutionalized of the transfer function through their organizational climates and adaptive capacities.

This research begins by addressing the effects of environmental influences on transfer performance using multiple regression analyses. Environmental influences are defined as conditions or elements existing external and internal to the institution and are listed at the end of this paragraph. Transfer performance variables will be based on 1984 and 1985 cohort analysis of first-time entering students. Specifically, the dependent variables will be: credit rates - the percentage of first-time entrants completing 12 or more credits within four years and transfer rates - the percentage of students completing 12 or more credits who transferred to senior institutions within four years. The questions posed for investigation are: What external environmental elements affect an institution's transfer function? What institutional elements affect the college's transfer function? To what extent do external and institutional elements interact producing an effect on the overall transfer performance of an institution? There are a number of institutional and external elements believed to influence an institution's transfer function. The constructs of the external and internal elements that will be used for the present study are:

External elements

(1) state articulation and transfer practices coded by the Kintzer taxonomic scale of legally and nonlegally based agreements (Kintzer, 1989);

(2) proximity of senior institutions (Anderson, Bowan, & Tinto, 1972; Feasley, 1981; McIntyre, 1984, 1987; Richardson & Bender, 1986);

(3) local economic conditions - percentage of county unemployment and county median income (Alkin & Hendrix, 1967; McIntyre, 1984, 1987).

Institutional elements:

(4) institutional demographics - college credit enrollment, percentage of full-time students, percentage of students over 25 years of age, percentage of white students (McIntyre, 1984, 1987; Minicucci, et.al., 1989);

(5) institutional expenditures and revenues - expenditures per credit FTE and tuition and fees (McIntyre, 1984, 1987); and

(6) faculty status - percentage of full-time faculty and faculty advising status (Cohen, et.al., 1985; Rendon, 1988).

The elements, as they are entered into a series of regression equations, will be assessed for their main and interactive effects on transfer performance (Astin, 1991).

The next part of the study employs a multiple institution case study to discern how and why transfer performance is better at some institutions than others. It is assumed that: Institution transfer performance is affected by the level that the college has institutionalized its transfer function; its organizational climate; and its adaptive capacity to deal with environmental conditions. The questions to be investigated are: Why have some colleges been able to institutionalize their transfer function better than others? How is the transfer function perceived and managed by colleges with high transfer rates as compared to colleges with low transfer rates? The constructs to be measured will be:

(1) activities relating to transfer (e.g. articulation, academic strategies, student service strategies) (Berman & Weiler, 1989;);

(2) practices (e.g. coordination, evaluation, and planning) (Berman & Weiler, 1989; Ewell & Lisensky, 1988);

(3) history of activities and practices (i.e. length of time each has been in place in the system) (Cameron, 1986; Zucker, 1988);

(4) organizational climate (e.g. communication between college employees, motivation of employees, decision-making of employees, administrative leadership style) (Roueche & Baker, 1987);

(5) adaptive capacity (e.g. organizational flexibility, organizational focus, difference between means and ends, coherency and stability of the system) (Faerman & Quinn, 1985; Zucker, 1988); and

(6) effectiveness (e.g. goal achievement, management processes, organizational climate, environmental adaptation) (Ewell & Lisensky, 1988; Krakower, 1985).

Information obtained about the constructs will be collected through document analyses (e.g. accreditation reports, etc.); site interviews with administrators and key faculty; and by modified versions of the Roueche/Baker Organizational Climate Survey and the Quinn's Organizational Adaptation and Effectiveness Survey. Data collected will be analyzed comparing colleges with high and low transfer rates by their number and types of transfer activities; by their formal or informal coordination, evaluation, and planning of transfer activities; by their organizational climates and adaptive capacities.

Information obtain from both sections of this study will be used to answer the ultimate questions:

To what extent can patterns of institutionalization of the transfer function and adaptive capacities be linked to high transfer performance?

To what extent does environmental press enhance or inhibit transfer performance relative to the degree of transfer function institutionalization and institutional adaptation?

Summary

This paper has reviewed what is presently known about the transfer function and transfer performance of community colleges. Except for the transfer activity model being developed by Berman and Weiler, there are no frameworks that can explain how transfer performance relates to institutional activities, practices, and climate. The conceptual model offered here emphasizes that measuring institutionalizing aspects of the transfer function and college adaptation are important when considering how effectively a college performs its function. Components of institutionalization such as coherency, stability, and organizational climate are all major aspects of the embedding process. Moreover, high levels of institutionalization of the transfer function contributes to organizational adaptation through established networks formed within and outside the college.

It is intended that this framework will help organize future assessments of transfer performance. A model of institutional transfer activity is needed to bring order to investigations and to establish a greater reliability and validity of studies dealing with transfer effectiveness. By using an organized approach in institutional transfer research, investigators will be able to identify critical variables affecting transfer effectiveness and can monitor changes in these variables over time

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